Angel Whispers

Poetry

by

Rik McGuire

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Angel Whispers

Rik McGuire

Rik McGuire's award-winning book of inspired verse, *Angel Whispers*, is the result of fifteen years of effort, as its breadth of topic and depth of emotion can attest. The subjects of his poems range from familial and romantic love and searing meditations on life and death—occasioned by the author's experience with near-death—to poems of the fantastic and macabre that compare favorably with the work of Stephen King.

In "Justin's Song," for instance, Mr. McGuire's alternating pattern of short and long lines mimics the lullaby he might sing to his sleeping child as he imagines his young life and where it could lead. In "The River's Edge," a funeral is depicted in nightmarish and disorienting detail, since the narrator is both the one being buried and a nearby spectator. And in "Kathleen's Story," Mr. McGuire explores the realms of ghosts and history in a chilling and heartbreaking gothic tale.

In addition to the wonderful poems themselves, *Angel Whispers* contains an additional treat for poetry aficionados. Mr. McGuire has included after each poem his notes on its creation. Writers and non-writers alike will discover valuable hints about the creative process from Mr. McGuire's testimony: for instance, how he combined personal experience and research in "Captain Kidd's Legacy," and the exact circumstances and feelings behind "Ode to Mom." All this can only increase the appreciation of his poetry.

Angel Whispers is the perfect showcase for Rik McGuire's talent, a meaningful collection of both real emotions and fantastic interludes, of details

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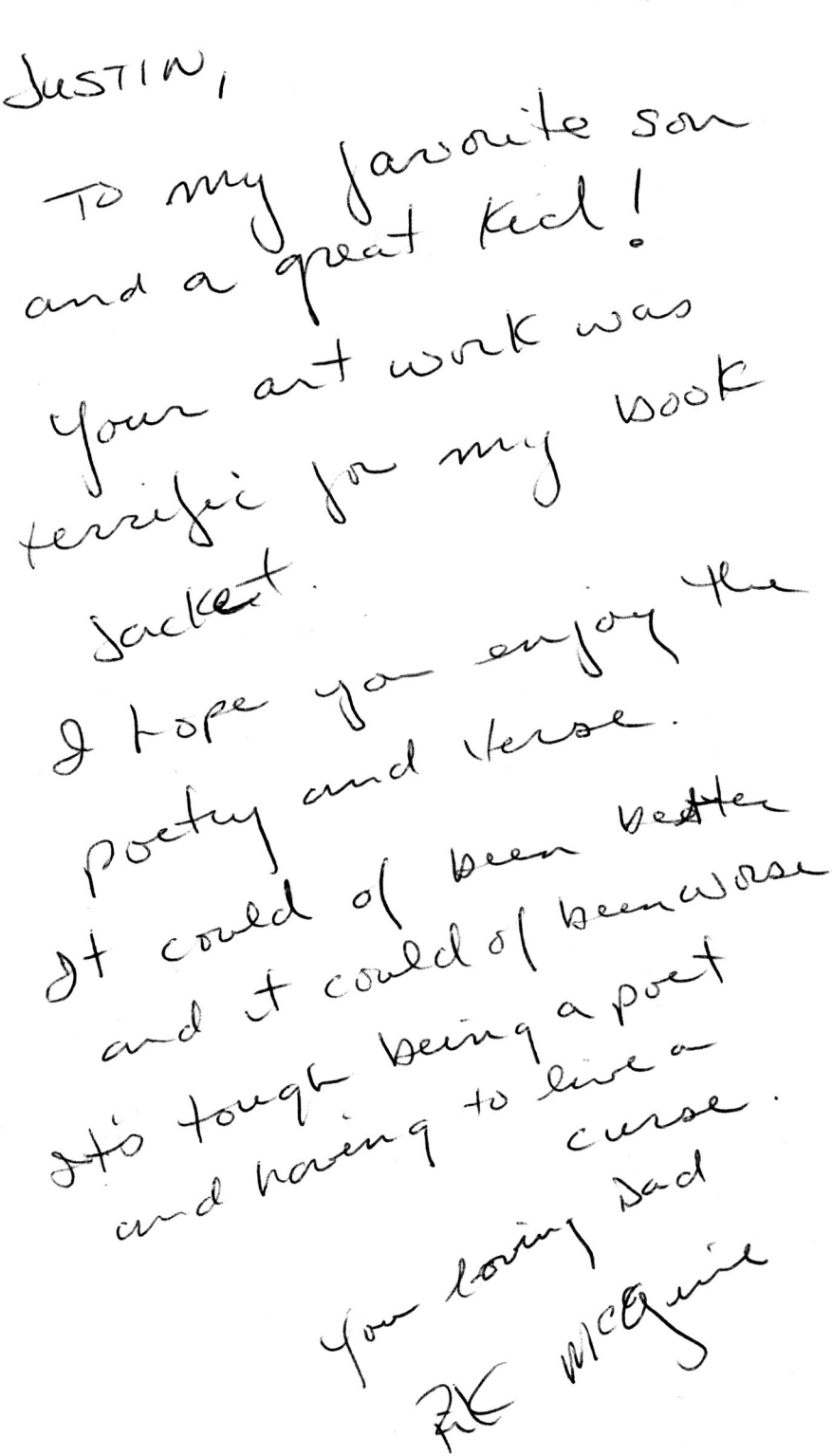
JUSTIN,

TO my favourite son
and a great kid!
Your art work was
terrific for my book
jacket.
I hope you enjoy the
poetry and verse.
It could of been better
and it could of been worse
It's tough being a poet
and having to live a
curse.

Your loving Dad
RK McGuire

Angel Whispers

Rik McGuire

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Dedication

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This book is dedicated to my mother, Josephine Marcus McGuire, who died unexpectedly on July 4, 1994. I really wanted her to see the book's completion and knew she would have marveled at it and wondered how I got my inspiration. It was from you, Mom! Thank you very much for everything you did to help with my goal of writing.

Foreword

❧

This collection of poetry is the result of about fifteen years of work. A long time ago I wrote poetry and enjoyed writing it, but I never took my work seriously. I started to take my work and art seriously after I escaped being in a six-week coma. My former company put me on disability because it was thought that I was not the same computer programmer I was before I entered the coma. While on disability I found I had a great deal of time on my hands with nothing to do but—write my thoughts. I enjoy writing a lot and dug up my previous work from before the accident, which I copied onto my home computer.

It wasn't until I entered one of my earlier works in a contest being held by the World of Poetry that I thought I should take my work seriously. The World of Poetry named me Golden Poet of 1992, and I would have picked up my trophy if I had been able to raise the money for airfare, hotel expenses, and registration for their annual convention held in San Francisco in 1992. I didn't have the needed money, so I gave up my chance to receive the trophy and satisfied myself with thinking I was going to get a certificate for my art. I never got the certificate and just thought that my writ-

ing career was over. The World of Poetry said they were going to publish a book of poems entitled *Our World's Favorite Poems*, and the poem I submitted into their contest was to be included in the book. I thus ordered two copies of the book at the poet's bargain price of $29.95 each. Then the World of Poetry declared bankruptcy and dashed all hopes of my being published. The National Library of Poetry came to the rescue and was able to release the book in September 1993.

I was invited by the International Society of Poets to attend their annual convention in August 1993 held in Washington, D.C. I had a great time and met poets from all over the world. If you had seen me, though, you wouldn't believe I was a poet because of the way I dressed. I dressed in jeans and a leather vest and hat. The vest had patches of the Harley Davidson emblem with broken wings, and my hat had a Harley Davidson bandana. The coma I alluded to earlier was from an accident I had had on my Harley Sportster. I somehow managed to get involved in a jousting match with a car while I was riding my Harley. The jousting match occurred when a bat-guano-for-brains character made a turn almost directly in front of my Harley. I taught the guy a lesson when I smashed his windshield with my face after I had been forced from my bike and over the hood of his car. I was wearing a helmet, but had no face protection. Thus, the coma.

I have depressed you enough, and it is time I explain the format of this book. You will note that there are no introductions to any of the poems; instead, there are notes after each poem. I do this

intentionally because I do not think it is appropriate to give any impression of the poem before the reader actually reads it. I would rather one would read the poem without any influence on my part. I have tried to group the poems by categories, i.e., family, war, macabre, and just miscellaneous. The groupings are by chapters.

The title of the book is from a conversation I had with a young lady in a bar lounge in New Paltz, New York. She asked why I walked with a cane and I explained that I had survived a coma and was even given last rites. She insisted that means I am an angel, thus the title *Angel Whispers.*

The title page was designed by my son Justin and I think he did a great job with it. It is amazing what you can do with computers these days, and Justin designed the title page on his trusty Macintosh. He hopes to be a commercial artist when he grows up and he is really good with both pen and pencil and on computers.

The jacket photograph was taken by my daughter, Sarah. We spent an entire afternoon taking photos. Sarah was very exacting and precise, about my position for each photograph.

Angel Whispers

Chapter I
Family Ties and Friends

Introduction

❧

This chapter includes poetry I wrote for and about my family and friends. Most of the poems were written with deep emotion. The poem "Ode to Mom" I wrote after my mother died, hence the dedication. That poem took a lot out of me and was very difficult for me to read at my mother's funeral. I have written many poems in a similar vein, but the poems I wrote for my grandmothers have been lost or misplaced. The way I look at it is that after I die, someone will find the poems and make a lot of money from my unpublished work. Dream on, McGuire!

Ode to Mom

We remember those Sunday dinners, so long ago,
But it was only yesterday, or so it seems
Nonni, Poppa, Mom, Uncle Paul and Uncle Butch—
We remember the family, even in our dreams.

From Sardenga to Port Washington,
Port Washington Road to Carlton Ave.
to Bar Beach Road
Spreading to Commack, New Paltz and Bedford—
The family spread away from the mother lode.

I remember the dinners on the grape-shrouded porch.
How we would eat and eat to our heart's content.
The passing of Nonni, Poppa, Uncle Paul and now Mom
Forces me to sit back, think and even lament.

I remember us as children and in the sandbanks
Where Poppa once worked and toiled.
There we frolicked and played, a daily routine.
We returned happy, our clothes more than a bit soiled.

Remember the dreams of yesteryear,
They are happy and fun memories of days past.
Remember my mom, a wife and Aunt Jo,
Remember those dreams of Mom and make them last.

Note on "Ode to Mom"

This poem was written after my mother had died unexpectedly and actually did not take too long to write, though it was hard to write because of the feelings involved.

I tried to capture our family as we were many years ago at the weekly Sunday dinners at our grandparents'. I really thought that everyone had weekly dinners like ours. I now realize how much I enjoyed the dinners with my family. It was typical Italian fare each week with pasta, sausages, meatballs and mushrooms, and lots of it.

For those who are unaware, Sardenga in the poem is the Sardinole way of spelling and pronouncing Sardinia, a commonwealth of Italy and an island off the west coast of Italy, north of Sicily and just south of Corsica. My great-grandfather was the ambassador from Sardenga to Italy and my grandfather grew up with one of the presidents or prime ministers of Italy. I tried to capture how my grandparents came from Sardenga and started a family in Port Washington, N.Y., and how the family spread to New Paltz, my hometown, and to Commack and to Bedford, Massachusetts. Yet as much as we spread away from each other, we grew closer in bonds to each other as a family. This is how I saw our family and my mother as an integral part of the family.

Justin's Song

❧

Sleep my child on silver dreams
of ice creams,
Dream my child of little gnomes
and fairy homes,
Dream my child through little eyes
that tantalize,
And be our child, our very own,
our very own.
You've learned to crawl my little child,
oh how I smile,
You've learned to walk my little one
and now you'll run,
You've spoken words that I can hear,
I want you near,
I watch you sleep my little son,
my special one.
I watch you play your childhood games,
and in the rain
I watch you climb from limb to limb
and down again,
I watch you stare at a bird
without a word,
I'll wipe the tears from your eyes
when you cry,

You're such a child to me now
and I know how.
I blink my eyes, oh how you've grown
from the little boy that I've known,
So sleep my child of gilded trees
and Tarzan dreams,
Dream my child of snow-filled fun
and bobsled runs,
And wake from sleep with the new day,
it's a very special day.

Note on "Justin's Song"

This poem was written after I had just settled my son of about three years into bed. I usually did this every night by rubbing his back until he fell asleep. One night I finished rubbing his back when I thought to myself, "What does he dream about when he sleeps?" I thought about this as I settled in my chair . I just happened to have a pad of paper in my hand and a pen and I started to write my thoughts. The poem just seemed to magically appear on the paper with no effort on my part.

My son is now fourteen years old and likes to climb trees and play in the rain when his mother is not looking. He does all the things I allude to in the poem or at least did them at one time.

Sarah's Song

❧

She smiles good morning and smiles good night,
She smiles with me and holds my arm tight.
She's cute, pretty and willing to learn,
Sarah, the wisdom you gain
you will more than earn.

She will see the people as they march and hop
While sitting alone on her mountaintop.
She will watch them play their silly games,
She will watch and call out their names.

She will sit alone on her mountain chair
And think she is lucky no one is there.
Wars and death will bring tears to her eyes,
She can't understand why people must die.

Sarah my daughter you'll be alone no more,
I'll climb the mountain and you can end your chore.
To watch the people hop and prance,
I only ask that with them you will not dance.

Note on "Sarah's Song"

I started this poem before my accident and finished afterwards. For some reason I thought of my daughter as a person who would stand alone and think intently about what was happening around her. I envisioned her on a mountaintop watching the silliness of the world below her. Even movies could affect her deeply, as I witnessed when we were watching the movie about Billy the Kid and she couldn't understand why people would shoot and kill each other for no apparent reason. Sarah would break down in tears with such movies and this continued. We were watching the movie about the California earthquake when she started to cry about people being trapped in a building as others were trying to rescue them. It took a lot of coddling by my father, myself and her brother, Justin, to calm her down. Thus the words:

Wars and death will bring tears to her eyes,
She can't understand why people must die.

Elaine's Song

Crimson leaves and painted trees,
The autumn wind is warm.
Walking arm in arm, our feet whisper
through the leaves
As we walk along.
Thank you for being close to me
And hearing this simple song.
It's not just the way you are,
It's not the way you laugh,
It's just that you care.
The days are shorter and the nights are longer,
The autumn chill is here.
The leaves are falling to the ground,
The winter wind is near.
But as we sit by the fire, drinking our wine and beer,
I'll always feel my life is full, having you so near.
Now I think I'll end this song,
Now it is time to see
And hold you close again.
Now I think it is time to be
Your loving one again.

Note on "Elaine's Song"

"Elaine's Song" came about one night when I decided to have a surprise birthday party for my ex-wife, when we were still married of course. The poem originally started out as a song that I sang at her party accompanied by my trusty twelve-string guitar. I no longer remember the music to the song, so I decided to incorporate the song as a poem in this collection of poetry.

Elaine divorced me because she claimed I was not the same person she married after I emerged from the coma. I was very angry with her about this and my anger continued until after my mother died and Elaine cut a vacation short she had with our children when they were in Israel. I appreciated this greatly as I needed my children by my side to help me through the funeral. I thought about changing some lines to make them more accentual or syllabic, but I decided to leave the original as I meant it to be.

Maid Marion's Tribute

Twenty plus years was that very special day
When we knew that at our feet the future lay.
As we grew we experienced love, pain and tears,
We experienced this through the twenty plus years.

I remember you, Marion, beneath your cap and gown,
The cap was your graduation crown.
I remember our years of study and toil,
I remember your smile that none could despoil.

You were so understanding and nice.
I questioned how—being of sugar and spice.
I only wished others were like you,
To be nicer and kinder as they grew.

I dream and wish of those years past,
Those years long ago hold me fast.
Now I wish you'd be Maid Marion if you would,
And I shall be your dashing and daring Robin Hood.

Note on "Maid Marion's Tribute"

I wrote this poem for a very special person who graduated from high school with me. We have kept in touch with each other and I met up with her when I was in Washington, D.C., for the International Society of Poets Symposium in August 1993. We had a great time rehashing our lives to each other. I thought on my flight back to Boston that I should write a poem for her to show her how much I appreciated her when I was there in Washington. The poem just seemed to materialize in my mind during the flight. I wrote it down as soon as I got back to my apartment and sent her a copy.

Justin's Bar Mitzvah

❧

Justin, revel in this very, very special day.
You have studied and worked hard to learn.
Today you are a man, at your feet the future lay.
Take it as it happens, come what may.

We revel with you as you enter into manhood.
You are in the springtime of your life,
Don't gaze down on where you just stood.
What you accomplished was great—it was good.

I am with you, I'll stand by your side.
Be proud of who and what you are.
Face down others, do not try and hide.
It is important to be yourself and have inner pride.

Remember this day for as long as you live.
I hope that as you grow older and wiser,
My poetry to you, I'll continue to give.
And in it you will see the positive.

Think of this day with a twinkle in your eye.
Be happy and open as you grow.
As you grow, give it your best shot, your best try.
As you grow you'll learn to soar, you'll even learn to fly.

Note on "Justin's Bar Mitzvah"

I wrote this poem and read it at my son's Bar Mitzvah in June 1993. I was very proud of my son considering all the years he spent in Sunday school and Hebrew school preparing himself for this occasion. I recited the first poem I had written for him, "Justin's Song," and wrote this poem as an additional treat for his special day. I thought it would be my gift to him as a special Bar Mitzvah present along with the money I gave him. I thought I did a pretty good job considering I am not a very religious man. I will write one for my daughter when she is of age to be considered an adult in the Hebrew faith.

Karen's Song

Karen, you ask, why I write my verse?
I sometimes feel I live a curse.
To be a Kipling, Poe or even Robert Frost,
I write my verse when bewildered or lost.
I write this for you because I see the same,
You are tired of the madness and the silly game.
When you arrive, you are ever so silent,
Asking yourself will the madness ever relent?
I see you question, I see it in your eyes.
I can see you asking behind your disguise.
Your only wish is to walk on the beach.
You think this dream is out of your reach.
To feel the sea breeze in your hair,
I see you yell, "It isn't fair!"
To endure this hell, no fault of your own.
How long will this trip last through
the Twilight Zone?
Stay the sweet person you are
And perhaps the end isn't that far.

Note on "Karen's Song"

I wrote this poem for a very special person I met at the head injury rehab. I was sent to attend for about two years. We talked and shared everything. I wrote this poem when I learned she was having a difficult time accepting her new life and the rules and regulations of the rehab. This poem was first published by the National Library of Poetry in 1994 in a book entitled *Outstanding Poets of 1994* and also recorded on an album called *Sounds of Poetry.* I have a plaque of this poem hanging in my apartment.

The Band of Three

We climbed over rocks and climbed through trees.
We ran barefoot through the woods
and over fallen leaves.
Alan, Erick and I were known as the band of three.
We separated at a tender young age,
the band would no longer be.

We played, experimented and we learned.
The wisdom we gained was more than earned.
We respected the world around us
like a new young fern.
Now it is time for me to sit back and mourn—

Memories of our exploits and of our past,
Realizing that I, Rik, I am the last.
Erick's death has left me stunned and aghast.
Those long-ago memories hold me fast.

Alan was the first to fly too low,
After flying in a war so many years ago.
Erick was there, yet little did he know,
Death was behind him knocking on the door.

Death was there to breathe down my throat,
But I refused to sail on its demonic boat.
The demon was unprepared for the battle I fought—
I wouldn't allow the demon to gloat.

The memories I have are nothing more than dreams.
I try to remember our exploits
by any fanciful means.
I remember the hill and snow-filled fun,
I remember the skating and bobsled runs.

We were the trio of fun, the trio to beat.
We were willing to do all and try any feat.
We built our forts and floated our rafts—
Amazing how my memories are merely drafts.

I missed Alan and Erick when they moved.
Their leaving only proved
It is easy getting your life into a groove.
Getting my life back to normal was not too smooth.

I still miss our daily jaunts
in the orchards and wood.
I know my son would enjoy doing this if he could.
He would have enjoyed standing with us
where we stood,
Amidst the orchards and in the wood.

Note on "The Band of Three"

This poem was written after I had been released from the hospital and was trying to get my life back to what I thought to be normal. I learned of Erick's untimely death and thought back to my childhood and how we experienced everything we could and enjoyed every minute of this learning experience. Alan, his brother, had died about three or four years earlier in a plane crash, when his plane hit some power lines upon landing. Erick was in the plane at the time and Alan's death had a tremendous effect upon him. Alan flew fighter jets in Vietnam and survived, only to come back home to be killed in a small plane. That somehow did not make a great deal of sense to me and I wondered about it. After Erick died I tried to remember everything we did as children and young boys. I guess this poem is my way of trying to recapture our childhood. Damn, I miss Alan and Erick!

Chapter II
Poems from the Other Side of Life

Introduction

❧

This chapter is about my accident and how I viewed my coma and surviving last rites. I told my son, when he said that a friend of his said I had death breathing down my throat, that I thought death had bad breath and I punched it in the face and said I wanted out. The poems are in chronological order from the time of the accident to being in a coma and surviving death to head injury rehabilitation.

The language gets a little rough in some of the work and I hope I don't offend anyone with it. I tried to clean up the language, but I wanted to keep the anger I had felt and still feel about the accident and how it has affected me and others like myself. This is a warning to all parents who might not want their children to read poems with such language. My children have read the poems with no ill effect. I thought it would be appropriate if I added the warning tagged on many movies today that contain graphic language.

Warning—The poems you are about to read contain graphic language that may not be appropriate for all readers. Therefore, reader discretion is highly recommended and advised.

It Happened One Night

❧

It was a warm spring night with danger to unfold.
The accident happened, or so I was told,
By a car driven by a demon from hell,
A demon who enjoyed ringing the bell.
A bell to signal a close to the fight,
The demon wanted and thought it was its right,
To cause damage and pain on that frightful night.
But I screwed up its plans,
I lived and kissed off the bands
Of death that held me tightly.
I now dream of that evil bastard nightly—
"Kiss my ass, you demon from hell,
Your evil is from the place I will not dwell.
I'll fight you on my own fucking terms,
And not when I am forced to live with the worms.
When I hear your evil demonic cry,
I can say quickly fuck off and die."

Note on "It Happened One Night"

This poem came about after I finished an afternoon of head injury rehab at a hospital and was very frustrated that I had to endure this hell through no fault of my own. I just wished to get back to my life as I remembered it to have been. I started to write the poem in the hospital cafeteria, and finished it outside when I wanted to have a cigarette and smoking wasn't allowed in the hospital. I made a big mistake after I emerged from the coma; and while in the patient's lounge I took a cigarette offered to me and smoked it. You would think that in not having a cigarette for over six weeks, I would not want one. I think I discovered why many head-injured people smoke like we do, but I don't want to get into a medical diagnosis right now.

The River's Edge

I watched closely as they lowered him down.
The casket is polished brass and burnished brown.
There are tears in my eyes as they lower me down,
Into the cold embrace of the fine, rich ground.

I watch the others as they weep and cry,
Asking each other why did he die?
I turn my soul with a tear and a sigh—
"All I ask you, Lord, is why, why, why?"

They lower me down, but I still stand
with the living,
And I feel as they do with their grieving.
"Am I living or dead, I ask everyone near.
"Should I be in the coffin or should I be here?"

"Should I be here or over on the other side?"
I feel a tugging from which I cannot hide.
I am away, away from the others who weep and cry.
I am by a river, watching the water rush by.

On the other side I see people from my past,
The wave of their arms holds me fast.

For many, their lives were short and did not last.
To see them now holds me fast.

The river's other side I could not attack,
I had to leave, I had to go back
To my life and family; it would be a test
But I have many lines to write before I rest.

Note on "The River's Edge"

This poem was written after I grew tired of people introducing me as the biker who should have died in my accident, and I started to wonder, what if I did? I started to see me being buried as an observer and in the coffin. It got a little weird for me. I wrote the poem to help me deal with my anxiety about the situation. My anxiety grew from being told constantly that my head injury was too severe to consider going back to my old profession as a computer programmer and because my wife of seventeen years was divorcing me. Can anyone blame me for being anxious about my life?

Deep Sleep (The Other Side)

❧

Deep sleep—Our time we were forced to spend.
Pleas for help we could not send.
Deep sleep—Awaking was slow and with pain.
On our families we became a strain.

Our sleep was deep, we searched for peace.
Known by few, we journeyed to the other side.
Upon waking we thought the pain would cease.
We woke thinking we could hide
Our injuries and our pain.
None can ever feel our agony
Until they ride that near-death train.

Deep sleep—Daily another unfortunate boards,
Daily another hears the strained chords.
Deep sleep—So many people and friends cried.
A part of us left, a part of us died.

We woke from deep sleep confused.
Our friends, husbands and wives were not
the people we knew.

We learned we were not accepted,
We had changed, many thought there was more
we could do.
Our pleas for help were too often rejected.

Deep sleep—We had changed,
we were not the same,
From the other side, where we came.
Deep sleep—The other side changes all who enter.
With exit, the changes you cannot counter.

It was a long, strained journey
From here to there and back again.
We're back, but a part of us still remains
Over there on the other side.
A part of us still hears the chordal strains.
A part of us cannot or will not return
From which, our backs we cannot turn.

Deep sleep—Will we ever be whole?
Can anyone say?
Our souls, our minds, on the other side lay.
Deep sleep—To the other side and back to now—
Will it ever be like it was? Can someone tell us how?

Note on "Deep Sleep (The Other Side)"

This poem was inspired by a song by the Moody Blues on their album *Keys to the Kingdom.* The song was written by Ray Thomas and called "Celtic Sonata." I was listening to the album when I wanted to write a poem about being in a coma and my impressions of such an event. This poem was first introduced at the symposium by the International Society of Poets held in Washington, D.C., in 1993 and was included on the album *Impressions.* I made several changes to the poem as I listened to it on the album, because I thought there needed to be a better melodic nature to it.

I must inform the reader that the impressions I have of being in a coma are just that, impressions, for I do not remember a thing about being in a coma. No, I did not have a near-death experience or out-of-body experience. This poem is just what I think I experienced in my coma.

The Head Injury Lament

❧

We all arrive daily
For the torment we are forced to endure,
So when we leave these healing walls
We will be people that society can't ignore.
We were cheated in our lives
There was taken from us, our right to live.
All that we question before us—
How much more will we be forced to give?
Did we sin sometime in the past?
God we ask you in your wisdom,
How much longer will this shit last?
We sometimes scream, yell and even curse
At all who surround us
Who say we are lucky to be alive,
it could have been worse.
Accidents, crashes and diseases of the brain—
Do you question? I ask you.
Is it any wonder we buckle under the strain?
We are stubborn heathens, you shout.
I can safely say from my heart
That what has happened to us makes us doubt
Of the freedom and fairness so boasted.
We were dealt a hand of cards

And now we are flat busted.
How can we play this silly game
With the cards we were dealt?
It's not fair, it's a fucking shame!
It has proved to us life sucks.
We can't make like Tom Sawyer
And say to the world "Aw, shucks."

Note on "The Head Injury Lament"

This poem was written after I had a particularly hard day in head injury rehabilitation. The second line of the poem represents my feelings at rehab:

For the torment we are forced to endure,...

I thought it was torment each and every day of my stay and I am sure the clinicians thought I was a torment to them. I don't want to get into my feelings about the rehab and how I thought they did absolutely no good for anyone, yet charged the insurance companies and clients themselves a good amount of money.

Beth's Invocation

❧

Beth, you perceive and believe
Our inherent need to be free.
You don't use gimmicks nor do you use tricks
As others do to get their kicks.
I know we are hard to take, not a piece of cake
To be left on the back burner only to bake.
We get on your nerves, but return all serves
That are pitched with those deadly curves.
But we ducked, bucked and even struck,
But never struck out like the others shout.
We're mired in the mud and we're tired
Of our injuries and we know we are not admired,
But rather ignored, put away, stored.
In this place, we are angry, frustrated, and bored—
All I can say for myself and the others I think.
Thank God you're here to save us from the brink.
It is you and you alone
Who make us feel as if we are at home.

Note on "Beth's Invocation"

Again I wrote this poem while imprisoned at head injury rehab. I wrote this poem for a special person there who was a clinician and good listener. Her specialty was occupational therapy, and she was able to find the weaknesses in our brain functioning and not make too big a deal about it. The "in-your-face" attitude many of the other clinicians had was not her style. I know when I gave her a copy of the poem, she was thrilled by it.

Chapter III
Weird and Strange Tales

Introduction

❧

This chapter includes the weird, strange and macabre. I like writing about stuff like this as I also like to read this type of story. I am an avid Stephen King reader and read almost anyone who writes this stuff. Why am I fascinated with this genre? I don't have a clue. I know I can scare the bejesus out of myself when I am alone and reading such stories, but I still get a kick out of the stories, and I like to write poetry in that genre.

I don't have any religious leanings in regard to my writings, though I am a Druid and belong to Arn Draiocht Fein (that is Gaelic for A Druid Fellowship, ADF, if you will). I have been a member of this religion for about three years since I discovered they could offer more for me than the traditional religions of today. I guess I am a Bard. In Druidic teachings a Bard is one who is studying to be a full Druid and needs to excel in three different teachings to reach this goal; and the first circle of this is being a Bard, or one who reads and writes poetry. Thus with this book, I have graduated past the first circle of being a Bard.

Kathleen's Story

Late hour wanderings
On a breezy autumn night,
I found myself by the gates
Staring at stones within my sight.

Standing motionless, I wondered as I gazed
At the graves and history held within.
I turned to leave and continue my trek
When the voice of the wind beckoned me in.

Confused at first, I was caught in doubt,
But the wind persisted with a louder call.
I ventured slowly through the gates
Held secure by the old stone wall.

Walking slowly, I followed the voice
Past sandstone graves and fallen leaves.
I had no idea where I was bound
For I followed the wind as it whispered in the trees.

Deeper and deeper into the graveyard I trailed
As the last glimpse of street lamps all but disappeared.
The only light was that of the moon
And the stars through the clouds shining as they peered.

I came to a grave all shrouded with vines
Where the bodiless voice told me to wait.
I looked very slowly towards the old stone,
Marking the last rest of a person's final fate.

Silently I knelt in front of the stone
Where I was beckoned to clear the vines away,
And I stared intently at what was inscribed,
For under this stone is where Kathleen lay.

I found she lived three hundred years ago
In this small town that witnessed her birth.
She lived for a short twenty-three years
And after she died she was returned to the earth.

The wind became brisk and breezy again
As it echoed through the trees with a mournful sigh.
I knew at once it was Kathleen's voice,
Reaching through the years after she had died.

With wonder and amazement I sat myself down
On the cold damp earth by Kathleen's grave,
And I listened very closely to the words she spoke
Of her very short life and the villagers
she never forgave.

She told me of her life and how she was born,
The only child her parents ever had.
And as a child she was a pretty little girl,
But alas, her childhood was lonely and was sad.

The wind became brisk and breezy again—
I knew at once it was Kathleen crying.
She told me of her sorrows and of her pain,
Of her family life and the village harping.

The religion was so strict, she complained,
Her freedom was restricted and controlled
By her parents who gave her guidance,
And limited the visits of those who called.

I felt the happiness in her voice
When she told of her illness and her death.
It was only through death
that she gained her freedom
She so yearned for before her failing health.

The wind spoke gently of her trials and her life—
I learned how she sometimes fell to the ground
In a violent fit of tremors and shaking.
She fell and shook and there was never a sound.

There were rumors and news
Of the trials in a village near where she lived
Of many women and one lonely man,
For what was claimed they wouldn't give.

The people who witnessed her fits
Claimed she was the home for the devil Satan.
They told stories of poor Kathleen.
What they told were lies and ever so blatant.

Kathleen was alone whenever the deacon called,
And as they talked his hands would explore
Her most hidden, secret and tender places.
When she cried to stop, her pleas,
he would only ignore.

Even during the trial Kathleen was given to fits.
When she came out she heard the holy nonsense,
So many people cowered and cried.
She was the witch they had just witnessed.

In the trial she was convicted of witchcraft
And after the trial her parents wailed.
They moaned and groaned for their only daughter,
They cried and wondered how they had failed.

The holy reverend deacon called one last time,
Demanding she repent and as before,
During his 'holy' talk and chant
On Kathleen his hands continued to explore.

The wind became brisk and strong again,
I heard Kathleen's voice protesting.
I was never a witch I heard her saying—
The deacon continued his holy vigilance and his molesting.

The wind calmed and became almost soothing,
I heard Kathleen crying in protest—
"Why am I buried in this lonely corner of the wood
And my parents in a far corner
of this very same forest?"

After I left I went to my home;
I thought long and hard of what I just heard.
The violent fits of shakings were not of a witch,
They were seizures that were only
crying to be cured.

I now understand the trials
of three hundred years ago,
The supposed "Truths" the "Holy" ones
tried to propagate.
And how they tortured, sentenced and executed
Those in society, they could not
and would not tolerate.

I visit the grave frequently
on lonely and windy nights.
I talk to Kathleen about her life,
And never once was I given to frights.

Was Kathleen a witch, you ask?
No, she was just a very lonely and sad young lady
Who suffered from epilepsy.
Kathleen suffered retribution because
of a common malady.

Note on "Kathleen's Story"

This poem was written one night when I was bored and went for a walk near my house, and I found myself by an old cemetery in my home town of Newburyport. I went in and as I walked, I studied each of the gravestones. I saw a pair I assumed to be a husband and wife buried next to each other, and upon walking further, I found someone I thought to be their daughter; she had died before they did. I was bothered by this and thought of it on my walk back home. I think I even dreamed of it. The next morning I was in my office at a local manufacturing company and I thought of the night before and asked myself why. While I was trying to figure the day's production I started to write my thoughts, and they ended up in verse. I do not have a clue if Kathleen was tried as a witch. I do know that she died around the time of the infamous Salem witch trials in 1692, and she was young when she died. As a point of fact, the Salem witch trials were not held in modern-day Salem, Massachusetts, but rather in Danvers, Massachusetts. The grave I found was not Kathleen's, but that of another young lady. I changed her name to protect the innocent. Any resemblance to persons living, dead, undead, or not yet born is purely coincidental and the product of my overactive imagination. Thank you.

Forest Elves of Ipswich
(Oaklim's Chronicles)

❧

My name is Oaklim, a writer of verse.
I was consigned to write of the Forest Elves
And how the Others laced us with a curse.
We cannot exist, or so they say,
Their God didn't create creatures like us
Who don't hold to their religious way.

We are but guardians of the land,
We are protectors for the Earth Mother.
We protect the earth from the Others' hand,
We are called Elves of the Forest
For it is the forest we call home.
The Others curse and scream at us in protest.

The Others don't understand and insist on control
Over the forest, land, sea and our race.
They insist on the power over the lands
and people they patrol,
The Others kill and destroy for sport.
We learned early of their waste,
Those who didn't hold to their ways
ended up in their court.

Many of our people were taken and tried
By the Others who didn't understand our ways,
Many were taken and sentenced to hang and die.

Even as I write, Ashkill, my friend,
was their last capture,
For a female Other had his child.
A child who will have no one from whom to be fed
and nurtured.
The child was noticed because of his ears,
The child is like us, but like the Others,
He will feel hurt, and like us have tears.

Is this what their God teaches and commands?
To abhor the couplings of two different peoples?
If so, it is the harshest of demands.
The baby was left in the forest to perish and die,
But our people found the child
and brought him to our trees,
Will not the Others feel the child's anguish cry?

The child will grow and learn
from our Elven teachers.
He will learn from us and our secrets,
Not from the Others' hateful preachers.
He will learn the ways of the forest and land,
With learning he will be one with us,
And when grown become one with the Elven band.

Note on "The Forest Elves of Ipswich (Oaklim's Chronicles)"

This poem was written after my children read a story I had been writing about the Forest Elves in New England. They liked the story very much and asked when I would finish it. I was busy with a lot of other things at the time and thought that maybe I should write about the Forest Elves in a genre I am familiar with—poetry. Thus the poem. The story is still not finished, as I am in the midst of writing about a half dozen other stories. I admit I am not very organized with my writing habits, though I try diligently to finish everything I write, and even take it to the extreme with continuous editing and rewriting. I am my own worst critic.

The Attack of the Kracken

"He's drunk," you shout,
Aye, and drunk I'll stay.
I'll not breathe a sober breath
Till I forget the ravages of that bay.

I mated on the Little Dipper,
A three-month voyage across the sea
And back; uneventful it was
Until we reached the outer lea.

I had just sat after the sound of six bells,
Talking and laughing with the crew.
As we talked there came such a shudder
That I almost lost my regulation brew.

What we hit was known to some,
A beast of such size that was ever seen by none.
When we saw the arms that grabbed at us,
I thought the ship and crew were all done.

I never scrambled so fast in my life,
Even from storms, hurricanes and gales.
Never had I seen a storm so strong
That it could shred and rip our mighty sails.

But these mighty arms ripped and tore
At our bodies and the ship.
Defenseless at first, we were beat
Until we fought with axes, swords and picks.

In the beginning we fought valiantly
With fists, blood and gore.
Little did we know the beast
Had a size none had ever seen before.

I fought by my mates
As they were gutted and died.
I saw their blood run on the deck,
If I could I would have sat down and cried.

The mighty arms retreated,
I thought we had won.
Ah, but, Neptune's pet beast
Was only playing and wasn't yet done.

I dropped my sword for one brief moment,
Thinking we were victors of the battle.
Our victory was brief, oh so brief,
Then we heard the arms' deadly rattle.

The arms were slimy from the sea
And underneath were the talons.
It was these talons that caused the blood and gore,
Our blood ran on the decks by the gallons.

The beast we fought was a many-armed Medusa.
We weren't turned to stone, but rather to blood and gore.
We defeated one mighty arm, thinking we won,
But there were many, many more.

Finally, after a mighty struggle,
I thought I had lived to see a new day,
But an arm grabbed me and pulled me into the sea.
Though I struggled and fought,
escape was not to come my way.

The name Kraken comes from a Swedish word
Meaning the underside of an uprooted tree.
It was the many-tangled roots
That the Kraken appeared under the sea.

After the mighty arm snared me,
I heard the noise of my bones breakin'.
Oh God, I thought, death is here for me
In the arms of the mighty Kraken.

It pulled me effortlessly into the sea,
I closed my eyes under the water.
And when I drew them open, the mouth
I could see would be my slaughter.

It pulled me slowly towards its mouth,
It played with me and it teased,
Suddenly I felt a rush of water
From its mouth, as if it had sneezed.

I swam to the surface fast,
After the arm released me.
I screamed and yelled to those onboard
To pull me from the blood-drenched sea.

Why did it end the bloody fight?
The battle it had won.
But, it stopped and swam away,
As if the game were done.

We gathered and searched the waters
For the final two or three hours,
Till we limped to the pier.
The air smelled of ammonia and it was sour.

Yes, I am drunk, as you say.
At my words you will sneer.
I'll tell you more of our trip,
If you'd be so kind and buy me a beer.

Note on "The Attack of the Kraken"

About seven years ago a giant squid washed ashore on Plum Island in Newburyport. It had eighteen-foot tentacles and a six-foot mantle (head and body). I wondered about creatures like this and read the book *Beast* by Peter Benchley, about a giant squid that terrorizes the Caribbean. Like the book and the movie *Jaws* it kept me on the edge of my seat. A friend of mine had a small boat and asked if I wanted to go fishing with him. I declined gracefully, stating that I know there is a giant squid out there in the deep waiting for me and I did not think it wise to tempt such a beast. Lying in my bed one night, I thought of how writers like Herman Melville wrote of such creatures, and decided to write a poem of a giant squid.

Lancaster Greens

❧

Foggy nights on misty moors,
Terror hides behind closed doors.
Shrouded stones of unmarked graves
Give the feel of what here lays
What beast is this with piercing screams
That haunts the moors of Lancaster Greens?

Lancaster Greens is a quiet little town,
The people unprepared for what did abound.
From the moors with shrieks and screams,
The grisly deaths of horrid nightmare dreams.
Daily we laid another to rest.
Nightly we hid from the evil demon's quest.

The evil, it's said, came from an old Christian ritual
That was practiced by a man, a holy individual,
Who sought to free the people
of heathens and pagans,
Not knowing our spirit is of ancient dragons.
Dragons that haunted the surrounding moors
That now forced the barring of our doors.

When pagans and heathens sought to interfere
In the ritual that cast away what they held dear,
They were interrogated and tortured
for their beliefs.
Many were burned at stakes as if they were thiefs.
It wasn't long before the church
abandoned its quest.
It wasn't long before the holy man
was laid to his rest.

We cry and shiver away at the night,
And pray for a shaman to deliver us from our fright.
A holy one who is learned of the ancient lore,
A holy one who will cast the evil from the moor.
Yes, we are pagans, as the church declares,
Heathens too, if anyone really cares.

We worship the Goddess we learned to adore,
Only She can free us of our deathly chore.
We cannot accept the rituals of the church,
Our belief is ancient and has held us in the lurch.
Only this belief will free Lancaster Greens
From that beast with those deathly screams.

Note on "Lancaster Greens"

I was driving home one night from class and it was very misty and foggy outside. I thought that I definitely would not like to be out alone on a night like this. As I passed over the Merrimack River, I slowed my car down and watched the river, and the line

Foggy nights on misty moors

just came to me. I tried to finish the poem that night, but found it impossible to do so, as I needed to be outside to get a feel of what I wanted. My wife and I moved to Newburyport, a town/city by the ocean, and the rest of the verse flowed through me.

All Hallow's Eve

❧

What a night it was that All Hallow's Eve,
With sights and sounds you wouldn't believe.
As God is my witness, I swear of what I write,
The events I saw did happen that night.
It was a dreary autumn night with the fog rolling in,
As the damp and cold brought a chill to your skin.
The tavern was closing with my last glass of rum,
And I hoped that its warmth was enough
to see me home.
I took my last swig and buttoned my coat
And turned up my collar to keep the chill
from my throat.
I had gone but a mile when I heard
that strange sound
That stopped me in my tracks and spun me around.
And off in the distance I could see an eerie glow
In a field that was abandoned many,
many years ago.
I stared and listened to the strange sight
That would awaken the dead and give all
a good fright.
I saw the shrouded figures with torches held high,
With demonic faces pointed up towards the sky.

They danced with madness and cheered with delight
When that demonic ghost came and appeared
in their sight.
In response to their loud incantations,
A being so large to astound the imagination,
A being with such an evil grin,
It beckoned to all to come to it with sin.

The shrouded figures roared with delight
When that demonic figure held them in its sight.
And finally after hours the demon turned to me,
And motioned with its arm to join in the melee.
I admit I was close to its capture,
Enamored so much with its evil rapture.
I started to walk towards its embrace,
Thinking I could escape its evil grace
Whenever I wanted, or felt the urge,
To escape the grasp of that evil dirge.
As I stepped closer into the crowd,
I was handed a cloak to use as a shroud.
I donned the shroud and it caused me to rebel
From that evil demonic bastard, a being from hell.
I turned to continue my trek home,
I only wished and desired to be left alone.
I slept fitfully that cold autumn night,
The nightmares I dreamt awoke me with fright.
The next morning I woke to the news
Of bodies and corpses discovered in the pews
Of a local church not far from my house,
And the reverend was found hung like a mouse.
Crucified, he was, on that holy sacred steeple,

To gaze at the world and look down
upon the people.
And in that field the shrouded figures were impaled
Like an army of knights to guard the evil grail.
The rumors continue as does the search
For the people who caused the rampage
on the church.
I swear of what I write and swear of what I saw.
That evil bastard demon is cursed by us all.

Note on "All Hallow's Eve"

One Halloween night, my son and I were giving out treats and candy to trick-or-treaters, and my son wanted to be the one who answered the door to give out the treats. He was only about two or three at the time. There came a knock on the door and Justin ran to open it. When he did, there were two grown men who growled "Trick or Treat." They were dressed p as ogres; Justin took one look at them and turned and ran to his bedroom. I don't think his feet touched the ground. The two men apologized and I gave them a beer apiece for their trouble. Elaine, my ex-wife, was out at the time and when she returned, I ventured out myself to see what I could of the night and the ghosts and goblins. We lived near the elementary school at the time, and I went as far as the playing field and let my imagination run its usual course. After I returned home, I wrote what my imagination witnessed on that night and that is how "All Hallow's Eve" came about.

Chapter IV
War and Peace

Introduction

❧

This chapter is based on the tragedy of war and how it affects our lives. I am continually amazed how some of the leaders in the world can provoke a war without thought of the consequences of such actions. Human life loses significance and is just fodder for their aims. Though much of the poetry in this chapter focuses on the war in Vietnam, I try to show the callousness of all wars up to that time. I guess I was raised during a time of resentment, which was Vietnam, and became greatly involved in the antiwar movement in this country.

The other day I went to the Vietnam memorial called the Moving Wall. It is a replica of the wall in Washington, and I found the name of a friend of mine who died in Vietnam. I came away from that wall in tears and wondered at all the names inscribed upon the wall. The wall is more than just a list of names, it is about individuals who died for the power brokers of this country.

Autumn's Restaurant

Slow and bent, he slipped through the door.
The war-torn man stepped lightly on the floor.
In a small clean inn on a poor city street,
Smiles and warmth from the faces he'd meet.

The aged old man entered with a wave and a grin
To each and every patron as they welcomed him in.
He stopped and spoke to those whom he knew,
And, those he didn't, well, he spoke to them, too.

The air lay heavy with a sweet kitchen warmth,
And the cook smiled gently while
handing him his broth.
A fine rich aroma stirred from the pot
Of freshly made coffee that was good and was hot.

A tattered coat and an old winter hat
The aged old man removed as he sat.
At the counter he smiled at those within his sight,
Away from the chill of the frigid autumn night.

He longed for the end to this night of dark
So he could go back to his bench and sit in the park.
And feed the birds when they came to perch,
And continue the vigil of his many years' search.

He sought a room he could call home
Where he could think of his children, now all grown.
And think of his life as well as his past,
Think of that long-ago war, that wasn't the last.

A grenade crushed his life's dreams
And upon waking after six months,
he heard only screams.
The VA released him saying he was well,
What they didn't say was that the world was hell.

He looked for jobs while roaming the streets,
Protecting himself from the cold as well as the heat.
The world changed, so he soon learned,
While he was away, or so he discerned.

He was damaged goods, so the employers said,
He should be happy to be alive and not be dead.
For years and years he hid in the bottle,
He slowly learned this hiding was futile.

He couldn't hide from his life or even the day,
No matter how hard he tried, it wouldn't
come this way.
Another war with over one hundred thousand lost;
He saw the boys and the effects this war cost.

Note on "Autumn's Restaurant"

This poem was written one afternoon when I was sitting in a luncheonette and this old man walked in and said hello to everyone and everyone seemed to know him, except for me. He was such a kindly old man and I wondered about him and his life. He seemed to hide himself when he talked. I never got to know him well enough to learn more about his life, but what I saw that day impressed me greatly. He appeared to be a very learned man and knew just about everything about the city, Haverhill, Massachusetts, which is where I was having my lunch. He knew exactly what he wanted and instructed the cook about the best way to prepare his lunch. The cook just smiled and nodded in agreement to the old man's instructions.

I left shaking my head about the man and wondered about him. I thought for days and days about him and the poem materialized in front of me one day.

News from Nam

Bearded and bent, he stands by the road,
City papers on his back are his daily load.
Water, snow, and sleet numb his tired feet,
But it is his corner, his side of the street.

A car will stop and through the window
a hand will flash.
Towards the waiting car he will dash
As fast as his tired war-torn legs will allow.
Upon exchange of money for paper
with respect he will bow.

Out from the infested jungles of Nam he came home,
Looking for work, he found there was none.
Respect, he learned, was not to come his way,
He learned this slowly, searching day to day.

One day walking the street in his futile search,
He was abandoned by all, even his church.
He saw with the daily newspaper he could earn,
If he would stay by the corner, wait for cars
to stop and turn.

For twenty plus years, newspapers to cars
were his wage
Winter, spring, summer, and fall, this corner
was his stage
To amuse and teach the passing cars of
A victim of chance and our country's wars.

Note on "News from Nam"

This poem was written when I was forced to go to head injury rehab in Lynn, Massachusetts, and I drove there daily in my car. Every day I passed this bearded man selling newspapers to passing cars. The weather didn't matter, as he was there daily. Sun, rain, sleet, snow and the most frigid weather couldn't keep him from his corner of Boston Road in Lynn. It was apparent that the weather had its effect upon him. You could see this by just looking at his grizzled face and white traced beard. Was he a Vietnam vet? I do not know. As usual I let my imagination leap and I made him into one. I did this because I knew many Vietnam vets who struggled to survive by cleaning car windshields, panhandling or, like the person in the poem, selling newspapers.

The Vietnam Legacy

❧

With trepidation I ventured closer
To the inscribed names upon that wall.
I saw all the names of young men and boys
Who answered our nation's plea, our nation's call.

That long black marble wall stood
As I read each name, tears in my eyes,
I was not alone, as everyone there did the same.
We wondered about these young men and boys,
why did they die?

More victims of this war, this tragedy
continues to mount.
A fine policeman, Walter Shroder, lay dead
From a band who protested this war,
this police action.
Katherine Powers of that band fled.

Ms. Powers was the latest victim of that terrible war.
There is still much anger at what she didn't do.
Officer Shroder died not from Katherine's finger,
He died from another of the band, but who knew?

Note on "The Vietnam Legacy"

I wrote this poem after Ms. Katherine Powers surrendered to police in Boston, Massachusetts. I thought it was a shame that a person like Ms. Powers had to endure this hell because of the stupidity of our government. I remember those days of the Vietnam War and how I thought to flee to Canada or not even show up at the draft physical. I had thought of this for a long time and even took French in college, thinking I might need it if I did indeed flee to Canada. As it happened, I failed the physical, or so says the Army. I personally think it was because I was somewhat of a pain in the ass during the physical and the Army did not think it wise to draft me when the war was finally coming to a close. At least that is what I want to believe. The only problem I find with Ms. Powers' actions was that she and her band did what a lot of people would have done if they had the nerve to do so. I am not referring to the killing of Officer Schroder, but to the actions of this group to bring awareness about the war to the American public.

Chapter V
Miscellaneous Verse

Introduction

❧

This chapter is just a grouping of verse I couldn't seem to fit in with the other chapters, so I made a special chapter for these poems. They don't have any significance to anything in particular, but I wrote what I saw at the time.

Captain Kidd's Legacy

He plundered and pillaged ships under sail,
He fled to port after pillaging each wreck.
He was lured to Boston, Massachusetts,
where he was tried.
The pirate Captain Kidd was sentenced
to hang by the neck.

Captain Kidd was buried on a lonely isle
Over one hundred miles from
that Massachusetts city.
His death and burial had the hunters looking
For the captain's stolen loot and his stolen kitty.

For over two hundred years the hunters searched,
But the captain was wise with his plunder.
Well hidden it was from prying eyes,
An easy find was not Captain Kidd's blunder.

With my children we sailed on the *Shenandoah,*
We anchored near the isle where Captain Kidd rests.
The isle is beautiful, my son and I agree,
But to find his grave was the hardest of tests.

We walked, searched, and climbed the isle,
But we couldn't find his marker stone.
It was a futile search, I thought,
Because the captain rests where
he might be left alone.

As we walked, I swear I saw a bearded gent.
My first thought was to yell, "Hey Captain Kidd!"
But I didn't, and he just nodded and smiled.
On a second glance, into the forest he fled and hid.

As we walked, I wondered, "Was that Captain Kidd?"
Was he showing his face to lead us to his treasure?
To lead us where the hunters hadn't looked?
For us to find his plunder, wealth beyond measure?

We searched and searched for his grave,
We gave up and walked the sandy beach back to the dory.
As we rowed back to the ship, the bearded one waved a last good-bye.
I knew then it would be another day
when I could finish this story.

Note on "Captain Kidd's Legacy"

My children and I sailed on a windjammer called the *Shenandoah* out of Martha's Vineyard. It was a beautiful week for sailing and I know my children loved it. We helped to raise the sails every morning when we prepared to get under way, and brought them down when we anchored at an isle. One day we anchored at an isle called Tarplin Cove, where the pirates of yesteryear would hide out, as it was a very protective cove from the law and the weather. My son and I marveled at how lovely the island was and how we would really like to live there. We later learned that the pirate Captain Kidd was buried there. We went ashore in a dory and searched for his grave. We never found it, but we returned thinking that it was indeed a beautiful island. When we returned home, I researched the history of Captain Kidd and learned that he was tried and sentenced to hang in Boston, Massachusetts.

Did I see the ghost of Captain Kidd? I did in my overactive imagination, and I let my imagination play the whole scene out as I wrote about it.

Cap'n Hawking's Starship

We journeyed deeper and deeper into space.
I implored Cap'n Hawking, "What of this race?"
He smiled and nodded to the forward port.
It was then I knew our voyage was for knowledge,
Not a voyage of interspace sport.
We had traveled many, many a light-year.
We had traveled far enough, our home planet
was no longer near.
It was for knowledge Cap'n Hawking yearned,
Knowledge of our universe and how it turned:
Upon one axis and in one direction of time?
How far had it gone? How far had it climbed?
It was for this wisdom he sought
A general unified theory, that couldn't be bought.

"Cap'n Hawking," I asked again, "how much longer
will we search?"
When suddenly the ship jolted, the ship lurched.
The cap'n laughed when over a stool I tripped
And calmly said, "On an event horizon we skipped."
Hearing that, I knew we had gotten close, so very close
To reaching singularity, our hopes almost lost.
"That black hole was uncharted," he said.
"If we had gotten any closer, we all would be dead!"

From the event horizon we skipped deeper into space.
The skip was noted by our light-streamed trace.
"Was there a beginning?" the cap'n asked,
"A big bang that started the universe's
continuing task?
"Did the big bang start the direction of time?
"Why do we remember the past and not the future?"
he chimed.
"What of this expansive known universe?"
Upon reaching a max, he thought, will it reverse?
Will we remember the future and not the past?
And how long this reversal, how long will it last?

"We're close to the end," Cap'n Hawking said.
"The universe's edge is close, it's just ahead."
The cap'n said this nodding to the forward port,
I looked and saw there nothing, absolutely nothing
of any sort.
"How can you be certain?" I questioned.
With a nod of his head the cap'n beckoned
To the forward port and asked what I saw.
"I see nothing," I said, "I see nothing at all."
"Precisely," said the cap'n, with a nod of his head.
"Beyond the universe is nothing, beyond
the universe is dead.
"Beyond the universe is an empty void," he chimed.
"Devoid of mass, life, light and even time."

"Are we going beyond the edge?" I asked.
The cap'n said, "I don't think it is a possible task."
"Why not?" I queried, rather annoyed.
"Because nothing can exist in an empty void."
"Nothing?" I questioned and repeated.
"No, nothing," he said, "that the big bang hasn't created."

"Have we reached our goal? Are we at the end?"
"No," the cap'n said: "We will turn
and come back again."
"Will we turn port or starboard?"
I was at the helm and I waited for his word.
"When we reach the edge, the ship will turn
by its own accord," he intoned.
"With respect to our angular momentum and speed,"
the cap'n added, "you at the helm we will
no longer need.
"Around this expanse, we will orbit the universe
For years and years until its life will go in reverse."

I write these lines for all to read and hear.
There will be more when by your planet we near.
From Cap'n Hawking I continue to learn.
From this knowledge my head I will not turn.

Note on "Cap'n Hawking's Starship"

I am fascinated with the astrophysicist Stephen Hawking who is a scholar in England. In fact, he holds the same chair at the University of Cambridge once held by Isaac Newton. The man is brilliant and more so because he is challenged by Lou Gehrig's disease. I became interested in him after reading his theories on black holes in our universe and especially so after reading his first book called *A Brief History of Time.* The man appeared on *Star Trek: The Next Generation,* which I did not see, but hope I will sometime in the near future. No pun intended.

I especially like the way he disputes other scientific opinions, such as the opinion Einstein held with respect to quantum mechanics that "God doesn't play dice." Hawking retorted that not only does God play dice, but He sometimes loads the dice.

I imagined myself on a starship like the *Starship Enterprise* from the *Star Trek* series, and knew that I would learn a lot from Mr. Hawking, and I would always be enthralled by his knowledge.

Soaring with the Eagle

The eagle soars and so will I
In sunlit clouds of a colorless sky.
Soaring higher and higher up to the light,
Then diving through clouds and out of sight.

The eagle beckons as I am bound
Higher and higher away from the ground.
The eagle smiles to me at last
As I forget my troubles as well as the past.

I see it motion with a flick of its wing,
I could almost hear it whisper and even sing.
It catches a wave and soars away,
Motioning with its wing to come and play.

It catches the waves better than I.
We soar together, higher and higher into the sky,
Away from others who envy our ride
Into the clouds seeming to hide.

The eagle executes a flawless slip.
I try in vain to follow its trip.
I know in my heart it will be another day
When I can learn from the eagle and even play.

If you don't believe I do not care,
Do what we did if you dare.
To fly like an eagle it's easy to soar,
If you open your mind and don't close the door.

Note on "Soaring with the Eagle"

I entered this poem in a contest held by the International Society of Poetry at their annual symposium held in Washington, D.C., in August 1994.

I used to be a glider pilot and I flew every weekend, weather permitting of course. I flew every weekend until I met my ex-wife, got married, and then bought a house and had children. Money became tight and I had to make a decision: Would I rather fly gliders or feed my family? The family won, of course.

I remember this flight. It was after I had just started to solo a week or two earlier. I caught a beautiful thermal within a mile of the airport. (A thermal is an updraft of air that helps in prolonging your flight.) My problem was being relatively new in the sport, I couldn't keep the thermal centered under my ship, and I kept dumping out of it. To my surprise, a red-tailed hawk appeared off of my wingtip and, without flapping a wing, it would soar about five hundred feet above me, then dive off my wingtip again. I swear it was laughing at me, chuckling that I didn't know how to fly and it did. You have noticed that I changed the red-tailed hawk to an eagle in the poem. Somehow, the eagle adds more pizazz to the sound of the poem and helps with the meter.

Confusing Thoughts

Lingering melancholy thoughts of mind
Interrupt the realism of now.
Thoughts of conquests past
And future dreams now gone.
The idealism of my youth
And the reality of today,
Bring such confounding differences
That I can't really understand.

Reaching for unknown horizons
That are obscured and diffused in thought,
I find myself accepting readily
The lesser of two reachable goals.
Questioning all that surrounds me,
But accepting the blurred answers,
I fight myself for the truths
That constantly evade my consciousness.

The occasional light that flickers
Leaves but a momentary trace in my mind
And is gone, but at a second glance,
It leaves me with more questions
Whose answers are out of reach.
But I'll continue to grasp at the winds of knowledge
In hopes that my questions will be answered.

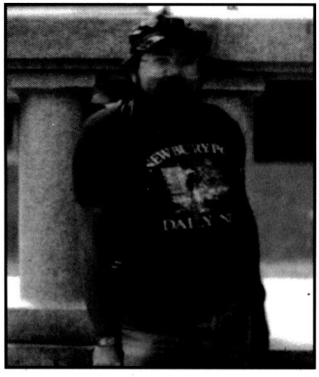
Note on "Confusing Thoughts"

I once worked for my ex-father-in-law as a plant manager, and I quickly learned that agreeing to work for him was one of the biggest mistakes of my life. I couldn't do anything right for him. I used to joke that it was good that I was born in 1951 after World War II or he would have blamed me for the war and the Holocaust.

One day after a tiring harangue from him, I went back to my office in the manufacturing area and listened to the noise of the plant for a few moments, and thought that the ideals of my college days had been totally shattered by my work experience, and I just wrote my feelings down as I felt them.

You will note that the poem has no rhyme or rhythm and that is obviously not my style. You might call it a brief foray into the unknown.

from the past and sharp observations from the world around us now, of tender emotions and anger against injustice. As the best that modern poetry has to offer, Rik McGuire's book is one that no serious reader can be without.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rik McGuire was born in Port Washington, New York, in 1951. He graduated from the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz in 1974, and married in 1977. He has two children from this marriage, a boy and a girl.

In 1990, Mr. McGuire suffered a severe motorcycle accident and spent six weeks in a coma. As a result of the aftermath of this accident, his wife divorced him and he was put on disability. It was then that he returned to the poetry he'd written in past years, both working on past verse and writing new poems. He finds that through this he can "maintain my sanity during this hated time of inactivity."

Rik McGuire was nominated for a Golden Poet award in 1992, and his poems can be found in *Our World's Favorite Poems* and *Outstanding Poems of 1994*.

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